

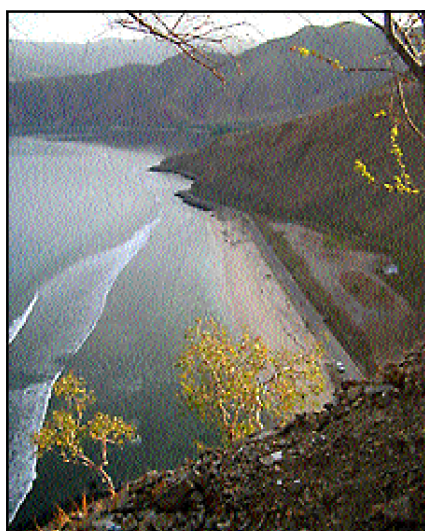
Dillydallying in Dili

The Portuguese showed up on the island of Timor in 1512 and soon settled in...and since then not much has happened.

That's not completely true (and there are a whole bunch of Catholic churches to prove it), but East Timor, and its capital Dili where I am at the moment, is definitely on the quiet side — except for the presence of several thousand UN staff (blue beret soldiers as well as civilian administrators and aid officers), and at least a couple thousand more aid workers and entrepreneurs from dozens of countries. All in a country of only 850,000! Needless to say, they stand out.



Early morning in Dili, the capital of East Timor, the world's newest country.



Beaches abound on this island nation. This spot, about 8 km out of Dili, is a great place to kick back for a while.

I'm here for two weeks (5-19 November) working with Family Health International (FHI) and the East Timorese Ministry of Health to begin the process of putting together a behaviour change communication strategy to help prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS. It's not as if it's a huge problem here — there are only 24 identified cases — but the approach is to nip it in the bud. The main target groups are sex workers, estimated to number slightly over 100 in Dili, MSM, or men who have sex with men (both gay and straight) of which there are several hundred (apparently bugging

your mate is not all that uncommon in Timorese culture), bus, truck and taxi drivers, and sexually active youth (kids will be kids).

At the moment we're planning on using peer education as the primary method to get information out to high risk groups. As our work is funded by USAID we have to push the "ABCs of Safe Sex" approach — A = abstinence, B = faithfulness to one partner, and C = condoms...if you can't stick with "A" and "B". In addition to peer education, we'll use the local media (one TV station that broadcasts only in the city of Dili, four radio stations all with limited broadcast times and ranges, and several weekly newspapers) to get information out to the general public. The FHI program has just gotten underway, so it will be at least a few months before activities and materials get out to the field. This is my first of up to three visits, so I'll be involved in helping to move the process along.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EAST TIMOR

The Portuguese discovered Timor in 1512. Traders from the Netherlands arrived in 1613. After years of rivalry over control and influence a series of agreements were made which established the boundaries of Timor. The west part became Dutch Timor, while the east part remained Portuguese Timor. Portuguese authority was constantly challenged by local rulers, supported by traders and missionaries who wanted the Europeans to leave. Between 1893 and 1912 there were several bloody clashes. After WWI East Timor was neglected by the.....(see *Brief History* — next page)



Nearly 70% of the population of East Timor is under 25 years of age. A strong family planning program, in this predominately Catholic country, is of paramount importance. The current population of 850,000 could quickly swell, reeking havoc on the limited social resources.



Brief History

by the Portuguese and became an economically poor colony.

Australia sent a small military force in 1941 to counter Japanese influence on the island, something they were able to do with the support of locals. The Japanese took revenge by burning down villages and killing thousands of people. Others rebelled against the Portuguese. This led to several massacres, as many as many as 60,000 people may have been killed on Timor during the second world war.

SO YOU THINK YOU HAVE IT BAD?

- > 63% of Timorese live on less than US\$ 2 per day.
- > Only 50% have access to safe drinking water.
- > Only 26% have access to electricity.
- > Only 48% of adult Timorese are literate.
- > Only 30% of children attend secondary school.
- > Only 24% of births are attended by skilled health staff.
- > Nearly 20% of the urban population is unemployed.

The Portuguese decided in 1974 to get rid of their colony. This made way for three political organizations; Fretilin who wanted to liberate East Timor right away, UDT who wanted a transition to independence under surveillance of Portugal, and Apodeti, a small minority who wanted integration with Indonesia. In 1975 Indonesia declared they could not accept a government that consisted of any members of Fretilin. UDT feared that Fretilin would stage a coup and took control themselves in a coup in August 1975. The civil war that followed forced the Portuguese to leave, and brought Indonesian troops to the border. Fretilin soon gained control, and on the 28 November 1975 they declared East Timor's independence, while both UDT and Apodeti declared integration with Indonesia.

Indonesia invaded on 7 December 1975. Fretilin soldiers lacked the resources to stop the Indonesians, and soon lost control over Dili. Many escaped to the mountains where they waged a guerilla war. East Timor was integrated into Indonesia in July 1976. As a consequence of the invasion as many as 200,000 people may have died.

Indonesian rule was strict. Compared to Portuguese neglect, the Indonesian government spent money on the health system, schools and communication. The guerilla war slowly faded, but never ended completely. On 12 November 1991 thousands of Timorese gathered in Dili to remember an independence leader. This developed into a protest. Indonesian soldiers fired into the crowd. The number of dead is still uncertain. This started a new wave of riots in the 1990's.

The fall of president Suharto in 1998 finally led to some welcome changes. The new Indonesian president Habibie promised a reduction of troops on the island and to grant East Timor some autonomy. Indonesia and Portugal agreed in July 1999 that an election should be held regarding independence for East Timor. This was held 30 August 1999, and a convincing majority of 78.5% East Timorese voted for independence.

The result led to total anarchy on East Timor, where Indonesia-friendly militias, supported by groups inside the army, killed thousands. Indonesia eventually accepted an intervening UN force, who arrived in September 1999, led by Australia. On 20 May 2002 East Timor's new president Xanana Gusmao was inaugurated. The future is not entirely bright. East Timor is considered to be the poorest country in Asia, and will need generous support in the coming years. (Source: <http://www.indonesiaphoto.com/article159.html>)



Cruising downtown Dili.